

For Immediate Release

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Sens. Hammerstrom and Johnson introduce legislation addressing Detroit-Wayne County Community Mental Health concerns

March 4, 2004 – State Sen. Beverly S. Hammerstrom, R-Temperance, and State Sen. Shirley Johnson, R-Royal Oak, today introduced legislation to address concerns surrounding the Detroit-Wayne County Community Mental Health Agency. The legislation converts the agency to an independent authority and changes the makeup of the board overseeing it.

Senate Bills 1076 - 1080 amend the state's Mental Health Code. SB 1076 will require the DWCCMH to be established as an authority (a separate legal entity).

If enacted, SB 1077 would change the makeup of the DWCCMH board. The new authority board would include nine members: three appointed by the city of Detroit, three Wayne County appointees and three appointed by the state. Currently, the board consists of 12 members – six appointed by the city of Detroit and six appointed by Wayne County.

The three remaining bills make other necessary changes to facilitate this structural shift and provide for immediate corrective action by the state Department of Community Health. These bills will join with SB 591, which amends the Social Welfare Act to require the authority structure for DWCCMH to hold a Medicaid contract with the state.

"My primary concern is, and has been, for the specialty services consumers of Wayne County," said Hammerstrom, chair of the Senate Health Policy Committee. "Consumers are not getting the kind of services they deserve. Senator Johnson and I have been speaking out and offering assistance on this issue for years. Our concerns are not new and they are not without merit."

(More)

Hammerstrom and Johnson have shared a concern about the DWCCMH system since their participation in the state's process to obtain the current federal Medicaid waiver.

"We fought long and hard for the federal Medicaid waiver which has allowed Michigan to keep its community-based system," said Johnson, chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee. "We will not stand idly by while the political infighting in Wayne County jeopardizes the federal waiver and Medicaid dollars."

If the federal waiver is lost, the entire state community mental health system would be bid out and consumers could be at the mercy of the lowest bidder looking to make a profit.

The two senators also felt compelled to act amid complaints from consumers and providers who have been frustrated and discouraged by the recent conflicts between the DWCCMH board and the county. Many also have questioned the removal of the agency's interim executive director and DWCCMH's failure to fulfill their state Medicaid contract, and cited numerous Mental Health Code violations.

The DWCCMH, which serves about 75,000 people with mental illnesses and disabilities a year, operates on an annual budget of about \$530 million. More than \$500 million is state and federal Medicaid dollars.

The Senate Health Policy Committee is scheduled to take testimony and consider SBs 591 and 1076-1080, on Wednesday, March 10 at 1 p.m. in the Senate Hearing Room at 124 W. Allegan, Lansing.